

## Background information on Stephen Victor Snr



Stephen Victor Snr is a member of the Nyul Nyul tribal group of West Kimberley. His ancestors lived in Ngaland – the current location of the Catholic Church in Beagle Bay. Stephen and his four brothers and one sister were all born at the Beagle Bay Mission.

Before her death, Stephen’s mother (Rosie) described her early life:

*“I was born in Derby in the old ration camp. My parents were both Christians. My father belonged to Beagle Bay and spoke Nyul Nyul language. My mother belonged to Derby. She spoke Nykina. I speak mixed, both languages. My father and mother brought me here to Beagle Bay from Sunday Island in a canoe. We walked from Lombadina Mission to here in 1918. I went only four years to school. I had to come out to do shell work. They had done three altars in the Church already.*

*The St John of God Sisters who knew my Mum, Rosie Victor speak of her today as a wonderful woman who was very kind and caring and had deep faith. One of the Sisters recalls her coming to the convent on the day she received her first pension offering her five dollars of her money. Sister was very touched by this especially as Mum had so many people to feed in her own house. Mum said it was to thank the Sisters for all they had done for her.”*

Stephen recounts his childhood in Beagle Bay:

*“At the age of 12 Mum helped in the Church putting the shells around the Stations of the Cross. She came here for schooling and lived in the dormitory with many other girls. That is when she met Stanley Victor Snr, my Dad. I was the only child she had to tend for because my sister and the two eldest sons, Stanley and Vincent, were in the Leprosarium in Derby (Bungarun) and the other son, Joseph was in the dormitory in Beagle Bay.*

*Dad was a soft spoken, loving and caring man. He loved gardening and had green fingers. Everything he sowed grew! He was responsible for finding spring water at Bungarun and a new bore at Balgo by using a fork stick (divining rod). He was called the Medicine Man by the others who were at Bungarun with him because he helped the Sisters give out the medication to the other people who were also sick. The Sisters admired Dad’s trustworthiness and reliability - he was there when he was needed, always involved as a peacemaker and organizer – and he never complained all through his long illness. He had learnt to read and write in Beagle Bay and had tremendous faith in God. The Sisters remember him as a competent musician who played the violin and the cello and was a leading member of Sister Alphonse’s orchestra. He was a very modest man but in his own tribe he was king and his favorite music was classical. His choice of music suited his status as King of the Nyul Nyul tribe.*

*Vincent and Elizabeth left the Leprosarium but young Stanley and Dad stayed on. Later young Stanley could have left but he had married Phyllis and when they were both cured they decided to stay on in the Leprosarium where they lived in a little house in the grounds and Stanley was employed on a basic wage. Their daughter Doris is with us in Beagle Bay today as a proud and important member of our family and project team.*

*In 1960 after I had finished Technical School in Derby, I went back to Beagle Bay to work as a stockman and a wood-chopper. My main job was as a carpenter with Brother Joseph Tautz building the monastery which was completed in 1964. We also cemented and tiled the Church floor with pearl shells.*

*In 1962 we were told that some of the orphanage children in Broome were being sent to Beagle Bay. That was the first time I saw my wife. In 1964 we were married when she sixteen years old. We lived in Beagle Bay for four years and I worked in the butcher's shop and the lemonade factory. In the afternoon after I finished working in the factory, I worked in the garden with the priests getting vegetables ready for the sale in Broome.*

*After a few years I went to Port Hedland with my brother to work as a stockman at Pippingarra Station. From there I went to work in the Nursing Home in Port Hedland as an orderly. By 1973 I thought that my Mum and Aunt were getting too old, so I took my wife and children back to Beagle Bay to live. We went on to Broome for work in the pearling industry where I worked for fifteen years. By the time I returned to Beagle Bay in the late 1980's we were a family of nine children – Madeleine, Benedict, Mary, Annette, Rose, Vincent, Steven, Anita and Jamie.*

*Over the years my greatest support has been my wife. Sister Philomena who looked after her when she was young speaks fondly of Dorothy as being 'gentle, refined and very special.' All of my children have been keen students, mostly in education. We have two teachers (Mary and Rose), one Teacher's Assistant (Benedict), one fully trained in banking (Anita), one qualified radio broadcaster (Annette) and one bookkeeper (Madeleine). We are proud of all of them and their children and their children.*

*In 1996 I obtained a lease over a block of land on my ancestral lands at Billard. Not long afterwards we lost our two sons – Steven and Vincent – who committed suicide three years apart as young men.*

*From that time the biggest chapter of my life has been unfolding."*